Senate's deep secret — JFK and the Mafia lady

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WASHINGTON — One secret the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence tried hardest to protect, with no success, was its own not-so-indiscreet ramblings into the personal life of the late President Kennedy.

What's more, evidence turned up by committee investigators but not disclosed in public hearings showed that the late FBI director, Edgar Hoover, and his agents were delving into it, too, while Kennedy was in the White House.

The committee has discovered FBI documents detailing Kennedy's association with a woman who had close ties with Mafia figures.

Although it rated only a brief and unrevealing mention in the committee's report made public last Thursday, the investigation of Kennedy's association and bizarre episodes pursued by the Senate sleuths.

Now fully discounted by the committee as insignificant, FBI documents showed that Kennedy frequently met and communicated with a woman friend of the late Chicago mobster Sam Giancana during the time Giancana and associates were working with the CIA on a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro.

The woman, then known as Judith Campbell, now lives in California under another name. She was called before the committee to testify in secret session about her relationship with the President and underworld crime figures, specifically Giancana and John Roselli, who allegedly was the mob's contact in CIA efforts to poison Castro in 1961.

According to Senate sources, an FBI investigation of the woman — the results of which were later relayed personally to Kennedy by Hoover — disclosed that she made some 70 telephone calls to President Kennedy's office during an 11-month period in 1961 and 1962.

Some of the calls, Bureau documents disclose, were made from Giancana's Chicago-area home. Others originated from the Mayflower Hotel near the White House.

Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln, Kennedy's private secretary, testified before the committee that Campbell was a volunteer in Kennedy's 1960 campaign. She said she could not recall whether the woman ever visited the White House or met the President elsewhere.

However, Bureau documents in possession of committee investigators, which make blunt allegations about the relationship between the President and Campbell, indicate that she saw the President in Florida in 1961 about the same time the CIA was delivering poison pellets to Roselli to use against Castro.

Campbell reportedly has given the committee a sworn statement that she never knew of the plot to kill Castro. Her testimony satisfied some committee members that the relationship with the President was purely a social one unrelated to her association with mob figures.

According to Senate sources, the President's association with Campbell ended abruptly after Hoover wrote memos to the White House and Attorney General Robert Kennedy that Campbell's association with mobsters could be embarrassing.

Mrs. Lincoln reportedly testified that following a luncheon between Hoover and President Kennedy on March 22, 1962, she was instructed to stop accepting Campbell's calls.